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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard           "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, so much for the Fall season!! Snow fell the other night near my neck of the woods; and it's been really cold lately. I hope that the "nice" weather holds out long enough for me to get the fallen leaves cleaned up!

Speaking of cleaned up, it's nice to see some of the big-time spammers start to take a fall. And those sellers on eBay who push bids up on their own auctions to get higher prices - finally nabbed. And even one of likely many scam artists who pull the "Nigerian" scam was recently caught. Perseverance pays off, apparently. Will all of these busts do anything to help stop the flow of these scams? Well, perhaps temporarily. I'm sure that there will be plenty of people ready to fill the vacancies. Still, it's nice to see some pressure being applied to these offensive practices. Let's hope that the pressure increases.

Until next time...

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Smurf Released Under GPL

The legendary graphics application Smurf has been released under GPL! The original authors from Therapy Seriousz Software have agreed to share the sources with the Atari community in order to allow the program to be developed also in the future. Sources will soon be available for anyone to download, but meanwhile read everything about the release here:

<http://topp.atari-users.net/>

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, Mother Nature is playing with us again. It seems that every year at about this time she decides to turn cold on us. Ain't that just like a woman? <grin>

This year, the cold has a special hold on me. Arthritis and bone spurs tend to react badly to cold weather, and I'm just learning about that. I'm not at the point of wanting to move to Florida or anything... but a trip to Arizona or New Mexico for a couple of weeks sure sounds tempting.

It's going to be an interesting winter. The only even marginally bright spot is that my chiropractor keeps telling me that I shouldn't be doing anything around the house. After mentioning this several times to my wife, she finally turned to me and said, "He said 'around' the house! He didn't mention anything about IN the house!"

I guess everything really does hinge on your point of view and semantics. Of course, it helps if you've got a devious mind too.

Well, I'm going to keep it short this week and get to the good stuff.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Wayne Martz asks about running MagiC on his CT60:

"I've been attempting to run MagiC on my CT60, and I think I followed the directions regarding the patch and stuff to put in the auto folder. But when it gets to the MagiC splash screen I get 2 bombs, then a scrambled screen. When discussing this on the DHS site, it was suggested that I try a different boot manager (I use XBoot,) but I still had the same problem. Anyone got any suggestions of things to check or try?"

Rodolphe Czuba tells Wayne:

"As far as I know, Xboot is not good on [the] 060! Caches problems! Use another boot selector..."

Janez Valant adds:

"Magic and Xboot is a no no on CT60. I do use Xboot still, since i like it a lot, but i know 1st hand that with Magic it craps big time. Removing the Xboot did the trick."

Steve Sweet adds his experiences:

"I use Xboot on an 030 with no problems."

Janez replies:

"Yes there is no probs on 030. On CT60 Xboot seems to mess with CACR and since Magic after bootstrapping magic.ram enter boot procedure again (running xboot again) cause a bus error. Thats is a speculation, but cache is most likely a problem with 060."

Janez tells everyone:

"Wow, thanks everyone for all the responses! It's going to be a bit before I can try everything suggested. Mark, how do you avoid using the splash screen of magic? I didn't know one could do that! Cary, thanks, I'll try everything you suggested and report back. Robert, Rudolphe and Janez, I had tried running without XBoot, and still had the same 2 bombs right after the splash screen. But I'll certainly try again. Would anyone care to suggest some good boot manager alternatives?"

Jean-Luc Ceccoli adds:

"Same thing on my TT : 2 bombs just before the desktop is displayed, but all works fine despites this - I mean : the bombs occur, then the desktop is displayed, and then I can use the computer as if the bombs weren't there. I had got it fixed once, but I don't remember what I did.

Menu6 does a good job for me - not supported anymore, though."

Derryck Croker supplies a bunch of helpful stuff:

"Assuming that this is 6.20 you should find a fully-commented magix.inf file in one of the sub-folders on your C: drive.

Write an autoboot.bat text file inside your auto folder listing the progs you want to run from that folder, in the order that you want them to run. Otherwise you could try Stoop.

An issue in the past with XBoot was fixed by uncompressing xboot using a specific uncompressor prog, the name of which escapes me."

Coda adds:

"I think this is related to the ICE compression that some executables are packed with, which crashes the 060 CPU because of the caches."

Mark Duckworth supplies a helpful hint:

"Load up your MagX.inf in a text editor and add a pound sign (#) in from of the line where it says "slashimage" or something similar. The option will be pointing to a .img file. This will disable the splash screen altogether."

'Douglas' asks about an interesting find:

"I have been given a ALLDATA automotive computer, inside is an Atari 1040ST main board.

This computer has one floppy drive on the back and a SCSI cdrom on the front for which I have many automotive repair discs.
Here is my problem, I turn on the machine and it attempts to read the cdrom, and floppy drives. times out and then boots to what looks like an Apple interface, I then have tried to read the original boot disk that came with the machine, no go, will not format a blank 720k disk either.

I have opened the machine, blown out with compressed air, unplugged and plugged back in all cables, and removable chips.
It never had a keyboard, though a phone looking jack is on the front, it was always used with a mouse.

Most of the machine appears to work but just can't read the drives.
I'd really like to be able to use this machine and would be grateful for any help."

Edward Baiz tells Douglas:

"It is funny there is no keyboard. I would think it would need one.
I am assuming the disk the computer is try to boot is an Atari TOS image disk. Maybe you need a new one..."

Tony Cianfaglione asks about swapping power supplies:

"Are the power supplies in the 1040 interchangeable with the the ones in the TT030? I need a TT power supply."

Edward Baiz tells Tony:

"No, I do not think they are. I would try Best Electronics or B&C Computers..."

Tony replies:

"I can get my hands on an old Mega ST2. Are they easily interchangeable with a TT ps?"

Coda tells Tony:

"No. You may need to find a small PC PSU do some re-wiring."

Charles Stanley asks for help with a stuck floppy:

"Last night I found my floppy (Atari TT) would not eject, neither via the release button nor by menu >FILE>EJECT>, which told me it was locked (which is rubbish on Atari).

After inspecting the slot with a torch, I decided to go Holby City style: ie, physical.

Holding the release button down, I grabbed the edge of the floppy with a fine-nosed pliers and pulled firmly. The floppy slid out easily.

The problem was that the sticky label had curled itself back on itself and had obviously stuck to the slot's frame. There were two labels one on another.

Lesson: do not stick a new label over an old one.

Such is my contribution to the world's treasury of knowledge."

Mark Duckworth tells Charles:

"LOL! Been there and done that at least 20 times in total!"

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Nintendo DS Ready To Launch!  
    " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " "  
                                Crash Twinsanity! Halo 2!  
                                New Spyro Ships!  
                                And more!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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## Nintendo Set to Launch New Game System

Nintendo Co. is set to launch Nintendo DS, the latest of its wallet-sized game systems designed to slip easily into your backpack and encourage procrastination wherever you may roam.

The Japanese company has already built up a following with its popular handheld Game Boy systems, but those appealed mainly to kids. Now, Nintendo is hoping the new gadget's sleeker design, more adult games and risqué ad campaign will draw teens and young men.

That would open up a sizable set of new customers and potentially give it an edge over rival Sony Corp., which plans its own handheld offering in coming months.

The lightweight, silver DS makes big advances over the last version of its Game Boy.

A two-screen display means more sophisticated game play: Players can see their direct surroundings on the top screen, for example, but look at an overall map on the lower screen, which also doubles as a touch pad to permit more precise controls.

Using a free wireless connection, gamers can also challenge others who are within 150 feet. More advanced games taking advantage of Wi-Fi are promised soon, allowing rivals to battle it out over the Internet.

Though Nintendo has long had success with its portable game players, analysts say Sony, with its popular PlayStation game console, historically has had more appeal with teens and young adults.

"Sony has a huge amount of brand cachet and they know how to market cool," said Schelley Olhava, an analyst with IDC.

Nintendo is clearly trying to match that with a \$40 million sex-themed ad campaign aimed at young men and centered around the theme "touching is good." The brashness of the campaign surprised some analysts.

"This is very untraditional for Nintendo to be aggressive ... but I think at this point it's needed," said P.J. McNealy, an analyst with American Technology Research.

Olhava said the company also is signaling its efforts to snag older gamers through the roster of DS games to be available within months of launch.

The new system comes with the futuristic shoot 'em up game "Metroid Prime Hunters: First Hunt." Other offerings will include "Tiger Woods PGA Tour," "Madden NFL 2005" and "The Urbz: Sims in the City." Olhava believes these titles will be more interesting to older players than "Pokeman" and other games for which Nintendo is traditionally known.

Even Nintendo's "Super Mario 64 DS," featuring the classic Mario character, may be popular with older gamers because of the nostalgia factor, Olhava said.

Although the company's prime target is a 17-year-old, it won't neglect its loyal young audience, said George Harrison, Nintendo of America's senior vice president of marketing. One feature likely to appeal more to kids is PictoChat, a system for sending messages and pictures to one another through the wireless connection.

"I think to be successful we need to appeal very broadly," Harrison said.

The company also wants to draw in less typical gamers, he said, although it has no immediate plans for ads targeting women or people older than their mid-20s.

The \$150 Nintendo DS launches in the United States Nov. 21 - hoping to take advantage of the post-Thanksgiving holiday shopping craze - and will be in stores in Japan 10 days later. Some stores are already taking pre-orders.

The company aims to ship 1 million Nintendo DS units to North America by year's end, with 2 million expected by next spring.

Sony's PlayStation Portable, or PSP, goes on sale in Japan on Dec. 12 for about \$190 and will also be able to play music and movies. The company has yet to announce pricing or availability in the United States.

Rather than one besting the other, Olhava said, both systems might find their own core audience in the near term.

"This is one of those things," she said, "where there might not be a clear-cut winner for long, long time."

## Crash Twinsanity PlayStation 2 Review

After "Crash Bandicoot: Wrath of Cortex," we had all pretty much sworn-off ol' Crash. But we knew that the Bandicoot titles would keep on coming; it's as inevitable as Sony coming out with a PS3. What's even more inevitable is that eventually in a series the protagonist and antagonist will have to work together to overcome some greater evil. But does this formula overcome a video game market saturated with like-minded platform games? Maybe.

The story sees the Wicked Twins invading Crash and Dr. Cortex's ongoing skirmish. The Twins set their minds on dominating the small island chain and enslaving Crash and his friends, while removing Cortex's brain for their own use. So what's our hero to do? That's right, team up with Dr. Cortex to defeat the Wicked Twins. You'll also get to play as Nina Cortex, Dr. Cortex's niece, and Coco, Crash's sister in your fight against the mysterious Twins, who threaten revenge against Dr. Cortex. Revenge for what? I guess you'll have to play and find out. Which means no sleeping through the cinematics, mister.

And without further ado, here are a few things that frustrated me about the first five minutes of gameplay. Immediately, you'll notice that you can't skip through story and instructional cutscenes. Not even if you've seen them before, not even if you've died five times in the same place and you just want to get through it all and do-do-DO it. What's worse, the cutscenes are always a second or two too long. This may sound like a very petty complaint, but when you're already livid from watching a cutscene and it goes on too long, it really cuts down on the momentum of the game. I found myself accidentally running into environmental triggers and having to sit through the same explanations over and over again (namely the first Aku Aku crate).

Then there's the fact that the slide button is the same as the crawl button. Think about that for a second. Why would an offensive button be the same as a defensive button? Simple - so that if you're trying to slide into an enemy, you can start crawling, get nabbed by the enemy, die and seriously consider jumping out your window, just to avoid the inevitable cutscene. Worse is the fact that, after your initial sliding test, comes the crawling test, where you've got to crawl underneath a swinging tree trunk across a thin walkway. And guess what, if you screw up the crawling, you'll have to go back to the sliding. Oh, and guess what ELSE? If you screw up the crawling, you'll have to watch, in full, the cutscenes that show you how to slide and crawl again. This is as frustrating as a game can get. I can put up with shoddy graphics or a storyline full of holes, but if you completely drain the the game's momentum from its beginning, you're also going to drain me of my will to play. Even my girlfriend, who is a patient gamer and loves cutesy platformers, said, "You couldn't skip through the story [on the Gameboy version]; I quit because I kept dying and had to watch the same thing over and over."

I kept playing because I knew I could be a patient man and endure the



cutscenes. I played through the initial level; controlling Crash, I navigated through an obstacle course of enemies and environmental dangers. But once I caught Dr. Cortex (who had dressed up in a wig to woo me) and defeated his giganto-mecha-bandicoot, the gameplay changed. That's when the Wicked Twins stepped in, forcing Crash and Cortex to actually "get along" if they wanted to survive the new danger. The "Crash Bandicoot" series has never been known for amazingly fresh writing, but it has a reputation for humorous moments, and "Twinsanity" furnishes moments that made me chuckle (however lightly) while I pulled myself through the confusion of the rest of the story. I enjoyed the jokes about the poor sales of "Wrath of Cortex" (self-depreciation will always make me laugh), and a few classic Warner Bros cartoon moments where a character would be so caught up in his own world that he didn't realize he was (for example) 10 feet past the end of a cliff. But it seems like some of the levels were placed in the game either to lengthen the game or add in a new feature. If it was up to me, I might have skipped all the story and just got to the action. But then I would have missed the good parts, as well as a few hidden jewels in the gameplay and story. And if nothing else, the game is packed to the brim with wumpa fruit and extra lives (not to mention infinite continues), so it's hard to put the game down once you've started.

The gameplay, however, makes you rely on those moments of satisfaction to offset the frustration of the rest. The gameplay does feel a little run-of-the-mill, but is broken up by small new features, such as riding Dr. Cortex like a snowboard. Also, you'll brawl with Cortex and form a ball-of-brawl that you can steer through certain levels - I thought this was easily the most fun mechanic in the game. In addition, there are levels where Dr. Cortex is running blindly away from some kind of danger as you run through a maze of triggers that clear the path of TNT crates and enemies for Cortex. These levels require a quick hand, as they get fairly tough, but they're rewarding. On the other hand, most of the game will be one character on his own (usually Crash), and the game will follow the general "Crash" conventions. From time to time, you'll control both Crash and Cortex at once. If you're familiar with other games in the genre - "Ratchet & Clank" and "Jak & Daxter" - you'll be familiar with the gameplay. Basically, you throw Cortex across a gap so he can press a button, pull a lever, open a door, blah blah blah. You'll be able to pull off the spin attack with both characters at once and use Cortex as a giant hammer. The fun, my friends, never stops (dripping with sarcasm).

As for the graphics, it isn't a stretch to say this is the best looking game in the "Crash" series. The character animations shine the most, as each character was given his (or her) own animation set. Crash moves in the exaggerated way that he should move, while Cortex moves with a little more calculation. The particle effects are decent, though they're better in the Xbox version. The environments are excellently animated as well, and it wasn't often that I saw dead space between textures while in motion. Everything's colorful and lush, and doesn't take much time to load. However, the framerate tended to drop in busy scenes, and in certain levels the camera can stick in a certain direction, which leaves you running and jumping blind.

The key to the sound in "Twinsanity" is you've heard most of it before. Well, at least you've heard the sound effects and voice work. This is understandable; I wouldn't expect the game designers to change a sound that's been established in a series almost ten years old. Some of the enemy sounds become a little repetitive, but it's excusable. The standout game audio is the music, which is almost indescribable. Much of it relies on tweaked a cappella instrumentation: a lot of "dum dum da da daaaaa" stuff, in other words. But it's all tweaked to fit the wacky style of the game,

and it works perfectly.

So take the good with the bad. On the plus side, "Crash Twinsanity" is the best looking game of the series, and does employ a few new game mechanics to get you through a relatively confusing story. But on the downside, with games like "Jak 3" and "Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal" coming out soon, there's not much room for games that lag on innovation. For the more discriminating gamer, "Crash Twinsanity" might frustrate more than satisfy, but for the younger audiences, this game could hit the spot. This is what I call a "babysitting game" - that is, if you're babysitting, or otherwise watching over a younger child, you might have fun steering him through the game or helping him with the many boss battles. It's inevitable that we'll see another "Crash" game in the future, and I hope the developers continue to innovate within the gameplay process. And for god's sake, skip the cutscenes!

Ratings (1-10):

Graphics: 7. The best looking game in the series.

Sound: 7. Great music and standard effects.

Gameplay: 6. Points added for small bits of innovation, points taken away for the rest being the same old thing.

Story: 5. We've heard it all before in every cartoon and video game series already.

Replayability: 5. I didn't much want to play levels I had already played.

Overall: 6 (not an average). A slightly better than average game, if you don't frustrate easily.

#### Spyro: A Hero's Tail Ships For Playstation 2, Xbox, And GameCube

Vivendi Universal Games (VU Games) announced today that Spyro A Hero's Tail, the next installment in the top video game franchise, has shipped to retail stores nationwide. The popular purple dragon is back in his greatest adventure ever for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, the Xbox video game system from Microsoft and Nintendo GameCube. Scripted by Emmy Award-winning writer J. Stewart Burns, the new 3D action platformer features five fully-playable characters and brand-new Spyro breath attacks, power-ups and moves.

"Spyro has been a favorite character and strong leader in the platform genre since its 1998 debut," said Philip W. O'Neil, President of North America, VU Games. "Spyro A Hero's Tail continues the franchise's tradition by immersing players into a deep storyline, more diverse, lush environments and a line-up of engaging characters."

In Spyro A Hero's Tail, Spyro must save the Dragon Realms from the Evil Red Dragon who has planted light-sapping Dark Gems all over the Dragon Realms in an attempt to capture and control the world. With the help of his allies, Spyro must seek out and destroy all of the Dark Gems to return the lands back to normal and to save the Dragon Realms from the evil dragon's tyrannical control.

Players guide the fiery purple dragon across dark, mysterious lands which change and morph from evil to good during gameplay - affecting enemies, environments, music, lighting, objects, and more. In addition to playing as the heroic leader Spyro, gamers will also have the opportunity to play as weapons master Hunter the Cheetah, dive-bombing penguin Sgt. Byrd, loyal sidekick Sparx the Dragonfly or the all-new burrowing, climbing Blink the Mole. Equipped with mighty new abilities including the Wall Kick, Tail Swing and Ledge Grab, and brand-new power-ups such as the supercharged Horn Dive, explosive Brimstone Bombs and deadly Ice Shards, Spyro also battles his enemies with powerful breath attacks ? Fire, Ice, Electricity and the all-new Water.

Spyro A Hero's Tail is currently available on PlayStation 2, Xbox and Nintendo GameCube. The game was developed by UK-based Eurocom Entertainment Software. For more information, customers can visit <http://herostail.spyrothedragon.com/>.

### Microsoft Sees \$100 Million First Day for 'Halo 2' Game

First-day sales of Microsoft Corp.'s new video game "Halo 2" will reach \$100 million, a senior Microsoft games executive said on Tuesday.

"I'm calling a \$100 million day on 'Halo' today," Peter Moore, a corporate vice president in Microsoft's games division, said at the Harris Nesbitt investment conference in New York.

The launch would be one of the largest in gaming history and would dwarf the first-day figures of even the biggest historical hits in the movie and music businesses.

"In the first 24 hours we'll have an opening that's (more) popular than any motion picture has ever had in history," Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates said at a shareholder's meeting on Tuesday.

The game, in which a super-soldier called "Master Chief" must save the earth from aliens, went on sale around the world on Tuesday, with thousands of stores opening their doors to eager customers just after midnight.

In addition to around 1.5 million pre-sold units, Moore said one retailer sold 8,500 units in the first 11 minutes of sales, while another sold 200,000 units by daybreak Tuesday.

Moore said in total, \$78 million of the \$100 million came from pre-sales. There are two versions of the game, the regular edition for \$49.99 and a "Collector's Edition" in a custom case with a "making-of" DVD for \$54.99.

Analysts expect "Halo 2" to sell a total of about 10 million units, with some projecting up to half of those sales coming in November. The original "Halo" sold 5 million units and remains the best seller on the Xbox to date.

"We think that this will be the biggest launch in the history of EB, perhaps the biggest launch in the history of video games," said Jeff Griffiths, chief executive of games retailer Electronics Boutique, at the Harris Nesbitt conference.

## Fans Throng for First Crack at New Game 'Halo 2'

It takes a special kind of person to stay up all night and stand in a line nearly 250 people long just to buy a video game - but for rabid fans of the first "Halo" on the Xbox video game console, it was well worth the wait to buy the new "Halo 2."

"It's just addicting," said Brady O'Connell, 22, a college student who joined hundreds of others late Monday night - and early Tuesday morning - at the L.A. pedestrian mall Universal CityWalk for the West Coast launch of the new "Halo."

Over the next three days, in eight languages and 27 countries, Microsoft Corp. will release its most important program of 2004 - not a new version of Windows or Office, but the epic tale of super-soldier "Master Chief" defending the Earth from a mysterious alien force.

Analysts expect Microsoft could sell as many as 10 million units of "Halo 2," and fans across America were all too happy to help.

"I just wanted to make sure I would get the game," said Mark Rodriguez, 21, an insurance agent who arrived at the Electronics Boutique store at CityWalk at 10:30 a.m. Monday, a full 13-1/2 hours before the launch.

Rodriguez played the original "Halo" for "about two years, eight hours a day, like a regular job."

The crowd that joined him to wait for the game was mostly young men in their teens and 20s, though a handful of toddlers and more than a few adults also took spots in the line. The store had at least 180 copies of the game on shelves, with hundreds more said to be in inventory.

But even before the game went on sale on the west coast, fans were already hard at work fighting the evil alien Covenant. Cam Ferroni, general manager of Microsoft's Xbox Live online game service, said Live broke its one-day record for most concurrent users in the hours after the first "Halo 2" releases worldwide.

While fans queued for a shot at the game, the development team from Bungie Studios celebrated the end of three years of development work at a party in Seattle.

"Pride" was how Bungie Studio Manager Pete Parsons described his emotions in the hours leading up to the game's launch. A core team of 65 worked on the project, helped by 8,000 Microsoft employees worldwide who helped test it.

"We spend all of our time making the game we want to make and hoping people will like it a lot," Parsons said.

People certainly liked the last thing he did - the original "Halo," released around the Xbox launch in late 2001, sold more than 5 million copies.

With 1.5 million pre-orders at about \$50 each, "Halo 2" is almost certain to generate bigger sales than the movie "The Incredibles," which made \$70.7 million at the box office over the past weekend in the biggest three-day opening Walt Disney Co. has ever had.

More than 7,000 stores planned to open their doors seconds after midnight on Tuesday to sell the game.

"I'd say 60 percent penetration on the console is a good number, so you're looking at 10 million copies worldwide," said Michael Pachter, a games industry analyst at Wedbush Morgan Securities, estimating about half would be sold this month.

Microsoft makes a loss on each Xbox it sells, leaving it to make up the shortfall with software sales. A five million-unit game, even at wholesale prices, can mean hundreds of millions of dollars' revenue.

"It's definitely one of the biggest games of this generation of hardware," said Jeff Gerstmann, senior editor of gaming Web site GameSpot.com. "It doesn't get too much bigger than 'Halo 2.'"

GameSpot gave the game a 9.4 rating out of 10. "Overall, it's one of the very best action games available," the review said.

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A-ONE's Headline News  
The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Eight EBay Sellers Admit to Phony Bids

Eight eBay sellers were ordered to pay nearly \$90,000 in restitution and fines after admitting they bid up products online to inflate the prices.

New York Attorney General Eliot Spitzer said more than 120 people will receive restitution in the settlement of the three cases, which wrapped up last week in state courts.

Spokesman Darren Dopp said the cases stemmed from specific complaints, but the office has not conducted a broad investigation of the online auction industry and doesn't know how widespread the practice of phony bidding is.

One buyer, Brad Clarke, 48, of Peachtree City, Ga., already has received a check for \$3,089 after overpaying for a 1999 Jeep Cherokee sport utility vehicle he bought on eBay from a New York seller in 2002.

"I'd always been suspicious because it seems like an easy thing to do, to just keep bidding up," Clarke said. "But I was still just completely shocked and very surprised."

Three sellers were accused of making 610 bids on 106 of their car auctions under the user name "Mother's Custom Automotive NY Dealer." They are paying more than \$28,000 in penalties and restitution, Spitzer said. Their lawyers declined to comment.

In another case, the operator of an art auction house and two former

employees were accused of bidding on more than 1,100 of each others' eBay items for more than five years to drive up the prices. Some paintings sold for thousands more than they were worth.

Spitzer said one of the sellers pleaded guilty to a felony charge, the other two to misdemeanors. They were ordered to pay more than \$50,000 in restitution and fines.

The other two defendants were accused of making 170 phony bids on their sports memorabilia items. They agreed to pay \$10,000 in penalties and restitution.

#### Australian Imprisoned for Online Scam

A Sydney man was imprisoned for more than five years Monday for duping people into sending him millions of dollars in a global Internet ruse known as the Nigerian scam.

Nick Marinellis pleaded guilty in the New South Wales District Court to 10 counts of fraud for taking part in the scam promising people millions from Nigerian bank accounts in return for an "administration fee."

Prosecutors said Marinellis fleeced his victims of 5 million Australian dollars, or \$3.8 million dollars.

Judge Barry Mahoney sentenced Marinellis to five years and three months in prison and ordered him held for a minimum four years and four months, calling Marinellis' scam "complicated and devious."

Culprits in the Nigerian scam typically present themselves as people who need access to a Western bank account in order to transfer a large sum of money out of a politically troubled country. They promise a cut of the money but ask for a smaller upfront cost before the larger sum can be transferred.

#### New Opera Release Offers Faster Browsing

Canada's SlipStream Data and Norway's Opera Software have integrated the Opera Web browser with SlipStream's Web and e-mail acceleration technology.

The new version of the Opera browser, release 7.60, will incorporate SlipStream's software.

The integration allows ISPs to offer up to six times faster browsing on dial-up and wireless connections, the two companies said. It also provides secure access for mobile workers and organizations with limited bandwidth.

"SlipStream is a product that provides acceleration for (Internet) users in low-bandwidth situations," Ron Neumann, president of Waterloo, Ontario-based SlipStream, told NewsFactor.

"Opera has long had a reputation for being one of the fastest browsers available. We worked closely together with Opera on the new version of its browser."

"For broadband users, the speed of the Opera browser may be somewhat irrelevant," David Snyder, Opera's vice president for desktop solutions and marketing in North America, told NewsFactor.

"But for the next five years, there will be a significant number of Internet users with narrowband connections, either on dial-up lines or via mobiles."

"We don't have a definite release date yet for Opera 7.60, but it will be before the end of the year," Snyder told NewsFactor.

"The new release of Opera is intended for desktop users, but there will come a time quite soon when we will be offering a version for users on other platforms, such as handsets," Neumann said.

"Faster browsing, coupled with increasingly fast bandwidth access at a decreasing price point, contributes to a better quality user experience, especially for content-intensive Web tasks, such as rich media streaming and music downloads," Yankee Group analyst Kelly Ring told NewsFactor.

SlipStream separately has announced a partnership with Symbian, the mobile operating system developer.

The Canadian firm has joined the Symbian Platinum Program to support the market for smartphones based on Symbian operating system.

#### Firefox in Full Release

The Firefox 1.0 Web browser is ready for full release, with features designed to make it more stable and secure, according to its developers.

Developed by the Mozilla Foundation, the browser had a preview release that started in mid-September. Since then, more than 7 million people have downloaded it, Mozilla says.

The browser is considered to be a top contender for taking on Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE), which currently dominates the browser market.

Firefox 1.0 has a number of features that are common in other browsers, such as pop-up blocking, tabbed browsing, and file download capability.

Like Apple's Safari, Firefox has Google search build into the toolbar. The browser also has other search features, such as tools that use smart keywords.

Other features include live bookmarks for RSS integration and text zooming. Mozilla noted that Firefox keeps a computer safe from spyware by not loading ActiveX controls.

"Firefox is the most customizable browser on the planet," the Mozilla site notes. "Firefox is as big or small as you want."

On its way to full release, Firefox has had successes and setbacks.

Critical vulnerabilities were discovered by security firm Secunia after the preview release, which prompted creation of a security patch from Mozilla.

Despite this recent security concern, the browser is enjoying newfound popularity and it is expected to do well, according to Mozilla. The foundation believes that users will gravitate toward Firefox 1.0 because it was created by mission-minded developers.

"Development of Firefox has been driven by a desire for a more robust, user-friendly and trustworthy Web experience," notes the foundation in a statement.

One feature of Firefox that IE lacks is a strong group of supporters, Yankee Group analyst Tony White told NewsFactor.

"The people who like Firefox aren't shy about it," he said. "You can hear their voices across the Web."

IE still has overwhelming market dominance, despite taking minor hits in popularity because of Firefox, noted White. But that will not stop Firefox's supporters from capturing every opportunity to tout their preferred browser's benefits.

"There are many people trying to get attention for Firefox, and I expect that will continue," he said.

#### Microsoft to Preview New Search Engine

Microsoft Corp., stepping up its efforts to compete with rival Google Inc., will offer consumers a preview of its technology for searching the Internet, beginning Thursday.

Microsoft has long offered a search engine on its MSN Web site, but the technology behind it has been powered by subsidiaries of Yahoo Inc. Earlier this year, the Redmond-based software giant conceded that it had missed a large market opportunity by not developing its own search technology, and announced plans to launch its own search engine.

The preview that begins Thursday won't include technology to let people search their own computer desktops as well as the broader Internet. But the company has promised that desktop search functionality by year's end.

Mountain View, Calif.-based Google has already beat Microsoft to the desktop, having launched its desktop search tool in mid-October.

Microsoft declined to comment further on what features will be available in Thursday's preview.

#### E-Mail Authentication Will Not End Spam

For consumers and businesses increasingly shaken by the growing onslaught of unwanted e-mail and the computer viruses and other nefarious hacking spam can bring, any hope for quick relief was soundly dashed yesterday during a government-hosted gathering of technology experts.

Several executives and academics speaking at a forum sponsored by the



Federal Trade Commission said criminals are already steps ahead of a major initiative by e-mail providers to counter those problems by creating a system to verify senders of e-mail.

In theory, such an authentication system would make it harder for spammers to disguise their identities and locations in an attempt to avoid being shut down or prosecuted.

But a majority of spam is launched by "zombies," or infected personal computers that are controlled by remote spammers. E-mail from a zombie looks as if it is coming from a legitimate source - because it is. The owner of that source is simply unaware that his or her computer has been commandeered.

"We'll be lucky if we solve 50 percent of the problem" with e-mail authentication, said Pavni Diwanji, chairman of MailFrontier Inc., a Silicon Valley provider of e-mail security systems.

By some estimates, the problem is rapidly becoming a crisis. In the first half of this year, an average of 30,000 computers a day were turned into zombies, according to the computer security firm Symantec Corp. In addition to serving up unwanted or fraudulent messages, spam is used to deliver viruses and other malicious software code that can allow hackers to capture private data such as credit card or bank account numbers from personal computers.

Hackers and spammers also have been able to exploit a lack of awareness among many computer users, tricking them into providing their passwords or account information in response to e-mails that appear to be coming from legitimate financial institutions or retailers, a tactic known as phishing.

The information is then rapidly sold on a black market heavily populated by elements of organized crime in Eastern Europe, Asia and elsewhere.

As incidents of the resulting identity fraud mount, "we're losing consumer confidence in this medium," said R. David Lewis, vice president of Digital Impact Inc., which provides bulk e-mail marketing services to large companies.

Lewis and others said that if the public reaches a tipping point at which Internet commerce is no longer trusted, the economic consequences will be severe.

Despite the authentication effort's shortcomings, none of yesterday's speakers suggested abandoning it, because it is seen as an essential building block for other solutions.

But the forum demonstrated in stark terms the depth and complexity of the problem.

Any e-mail authentication system, for example, would check that the block of Internet addresses assigned to an e-mail provider includes the specific numeric address of a sender of a piece of e-mail.

Thus, a red flag would go up if a message seeming to come from bob@xyz-123.net is actually not coming from a computer that uses the xyz-123.net mail service.

But Scott Chasin, chief technology officer of e-mail security firm MX Logic Inc., said the underlying Internet system that houses the necessary data is

insecure and can be tricked by hackers. Chasin said the problem has been known for 10 years, but industry and Internet standard-setters have been unable or unwilling to fix the problem by encrypting the data.

Getting agreement on an authentication system has been similarly difficult and is partly why the FTC held the summit.

The major e-mail providers, America Online Inc., Microsoft Corp., Yahoo Inc. and EarthLink Inc., are still testing and pushing various plans. The Internet group assigned to endorse a standard disbanded recently, unable to resolve discord and uncertainty over whether licensing rights asserted by Microsoft would cut out a broad swath of organizations that use so-called open-source software.

Chasin and other panelists also said the basic operating systems that power computers - the most dominant of which is Microsoft Windows - remain too vulnerable to hackers.

He said a worm was recently discovered that lodges itself in Windows files and goes to work when a computer user tries to access the Web site of his or her bank. The malicious code automatically redirects the Web browser to a fake page that looks like the real thing.

In this scenario, the user has not been duped by a fake phishing e-mail. Instead, the vulnerability in the operating system has allowed the code to redirect the user's browser to a phony page where a hacker can capture the user's name and password.

Still, panelists insisted authentication is a vital first step. After that, they said, could come a system that evaluates the "reputation" of senders, perhaps using a process that marks good e-mail with an electronic seal of approval.

#### Ownership of Anti-Spam Measure Queried at Talks

Internet companies have begun to change the way e-mail works in order to weed out spam, but experts on Tuesday clashed over whether the underlying technology should be controlled by any one company.

At a meeting hosted by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission, advocates of open-source technology questioned whether a standard patented by Microsoft Corp. should be incorporated into the fabric of the Internet, where free, open-source software has long dominated.

Others said they didn't care which standard was adopted as long as it provided a way to highlight legitimate e-mail in a sea of spam.

"We want to make sure our guys have the ability to communicate with their consumers, period," said Louis Mastria, spokesman for the Direct Marketing Association, which represents 5,000 bulk mailers.

Senders of unsolicited spam and deceptive "phishing" attacks commonly use fake addresses to slip through content filters. Microsoft officials estimate that 81 percent of all mail coming into its Hotmail system is "spoofed" in this way.

Microsoft and companies like Cisco Systems Inc. and Yahoo Inc. have

developed different methods to verify e-mail to determine that a message from, for example, joe@example.com actually comes from example.com's mail servers.

E-mail providers like Time Warner Inc.'s America Online and EarthLink Inc. have begun to test Microsoft's standard, which is invisible to everyday users.

Yahoo and Cisco's approaches are more technically demanding and will take longer to implement.

Microsoft has sought to combine its proposal with another popular standard developed by entrepreneur Meng Wong, but splits appeared in September when open-source advocates said they were reluctant to use Microsoft-patented technology, even though the dominant software company said it would not charge for its use.

David Kaefer of Microsoft said the patent "sets up a legal framework for people to do business with one another, for people to not end up in a situation where they end up in legal disputes."

But the Apache software used by most Web servers has flourished without patents, said Daniel Quinlan, vice president of Apache SpamAssassin.

Harvard University's Scott Bradner said the legal language put forward by Microsoft clouded what should have been a technical discussion among engineers looking for a reliable standard.

"The license was written in lawyer, it wasn't written in human," he said.

Microsoft has since revised its standard and won the support of technology companies including Sendmail Inc., whose open-source software is widely used to run e-mail systems.

#### PeopleSoft Rejects Oracle Bid

PeopleSoft Inc. on Wednesday said its board had again unanimously rejected Oracle Corp.'s \$8.8 billion hostile tender offer, and Oracle immediately appealed to PeopleSoft's shareholders, saying it would leave the decision up to them.

PeopleSoft Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Dave Duffield said in a statement the board concluded PeopleSoft "is worth substantially more" than Oracle's latest offer of \$24 a share.

The PeopleSoft board again recommended PeopleSoft stockholders not to tender their shares to Oracle, which has said it will drop its offer if fewer than half of PeopleSoft shareholders tender their shares by Oracle's Nov. 19 deadline.

Oracle Chief Executive Larry Ellison responded by issuing a statement saying, "Beyond (\$24 a share), there are better uses of our capital including other acquisitions and repurchasing our own shares.

"Oracle has been at this for a year and a half and it is now time to bring this matter to a close."

Oracle, which first launched the takeover battle for its smaller rival back in June 2003, proffered \$24 per share last week as its "best and final" bid.

Early this year, Oracle had offered as much as \$26 per share. Because PeopleSoft's board rebuffed that bid, many investors and sources within the industry expected PeopleSoft's board to reject Oracle's latest entreaty.

Oracle's executives have stayed busy in the past week lobbying PeopleSoft shareholders in favor of the bid, which it confirmed would be its last to a Delaware judge presiding over a lawsuit between the companies.

#### AOL Tells Customers to Find New Carrier

America Online, which earlier this year stopped signing up new broadband customers, is telling existing broadband subscribers in nine Southern states that they must find a new broadband carrier by Jan. 17.

Those customers who do not switch to a new broadband carrier by that date will have their accounts revert to AOL's traditional dialup service, said AOL spokeswoman Anne Bentley.

The company has been e-mailing its customers in those nine states that they can switch to high-speed broadband service offered by BellSouth Corp. for a special promotional rate.

Most of AOL's 23 million subscribers receive standard dialup service for \$24 a month. The company will not disclose how many customers still receive the \$54 monthly broadband service, which Bentley acknowledged is relatively expensive compared to other broadband pricing packages now available to consumers.

Bentley said she expects AOL will phase out existing broadband customers in the rest of the country in a similar manner over the next year.

The affected states are Florida, Kentucky, Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, North Carolina and South Carolina.

#### U.S. to Allow Some Telemarketing 'Robo Calls'

Telemarketers will be able to use prerecorded "robo calls" to stay in touch with established customers starting next week - at least for the short term, U.S. regulators said Friday.

The Federal Trade Commission currently forbids telemarketers from using prerecorded messages on more than three percent of all calls. But the consumer-protection agency said it will take another look at the issue starting next week, and in the meantime will not take action against marketers who use them.

Another agency, the Federal Communications Commission, allows telemarketers to use such "robo calls" with existing customers.

Other telemarketing regulations, such as the popular Do Not Call Registry, would not be affected. Telemarketers still cannot call the 60 million phone numbers on the no-call list, and cannot use robo calls when trying to drum up new customers.

The rule change could allow sports teams, for example, to use a star player's voice when calling season-ticket holders to renew their seats.

Those who do not want to receive robo calls from the team will be given a chance to opt out during the call, the FTC said.

The Direct Marketing Association currently advises its 5,000 members not to make such calls even though the FCC allows them, said Jerry Cersale, DMA's senior vice president for government affairs.

"We think it's a good idea to harmonize these regulations so there's a national standard," he said.

The FTC said it would solicit public comments on the proposed rule change through Jan. 20, 2005.

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